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Statement submitted by WePower — Women's Electoral Power for the Advancement of Women's Leadership in Israel (R.A.), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

WePower's Ad-Hoc Coalition to Advance Women Candidates in Israel's October 30, 2018 Municipal Elections — Taking the Initiative, Providing Access to Services and Working Effectively to Narrow the Gender Gap in Political Leadership

Equal representation of women in local politics and governance is vital to achieve gender equality. WePower is implementing new and alternative approaches to strengthen women's participation in elections, in order to change the low representation rate of women in local governance, and to increase the active participation of women in municipal processes.

WePower, a leading non-profit, non-partisan Israeli Non-governmental organisation proactively promoting women's leadership in the highest echelons of decision-making and in elected positions, aims to advance women's leadership and gender mainstreaming in all levels of society, especially in the political and public arenas, and change the under-representation of women both at the national and local levels.

In 2017, WePower launched an unprecedented initiative, to create and lead an ad-hoc coalition to change the gender gap in the upcoming October 30th, 2018 Israel Municipality Elections, in partnership with the major women's organizations in Israel. The coalition's name is "Local 2018". As Election Day approaches, over 25 organizations are still working together under our leadership, full strength, to help all women candidates run successfully for the municipal offices of their choice.

The following are some of Local 2018 and WePower's activities towards the upcoming elections and their effect on advancing women candidates thus far:

- The Local 2018 coalition of over 25 organisations headed by WePower made training and mentoring for the October 2018 Israeli municipal elections accessible to women candidates, both physically and financially, regardless of their location. The coalition provided women with courses on politics and leadership (including online, for those at faraway locations) for very reasonable prices; free advice and consultations, including information on available government services; connections to form a network of peers; and assignment of mentors with experience in the political and instructional fields, who volunteer their time and efforts to support and advise women candidates on a one-on-one basis, even in distant locations.

- In addition, the Coalition is in touch with Israel's female members of Parliament and arranged for events, for the running candidates to participate in and see Israeli women who currently serve in political and public offices, such as Parliament events for the International Woman's Day. Furthermore, the Coalition itself holds periodic meetings for updates and exchange of information between the member organizations, in order to maximize the results and effectiveness of the joint work and activities.

- The Local 2018 coalition drafted a Pledge Calling for Gender-Equal Municipal Elections. Dozens of mayors, heads of parties' lists and Knesset (Israeli Parliament) members signed the Local 2018 pledge.

- As a first step, with the support of the Israeli Authority for the Advancement of Gender Equality, the Coalition held conferences and turned personally to women, to encourage them to run. Later on, Local 2018 held a campaign directed at the voters, to ask them to support women candidates, while also

demanding from the heads of political parties and heads of the parties' lists to include as many women candidates as men — a campaign for "Equal Lists".

– WePower and Local 2018 took the initiative in their hands to provide essential services, which are not accessible through, or supplied by, Israel's public or social services, but are in fact necessary for any candidate's successful and competitive elections campaign. We continue to do so in the hope that, as the number of women in government grow, so will the provision for these services, as there is recognition of the importance to afford access to them.

WePower embraces the goal of narrowing the gender gap to 50/50 by 2030 and works on the field, providing services, supporting change and strengthening the sustainable infrastructure for gender equality.

– It is WePower's belief that sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment of women MUST include education for women who consider, aspire or run for political or public office, but who do not have the necessary background, networking environments, tools or experience in the politics and processes of a campaign for the public office they may wish to seek.

WePower provides instruction, tools and training, provides platforms for networking following training, and even mentoring from experienced former women candidates to political and public offices. For the upcoming elections, in addition to heading Local 2018, WePower also attended dozens of conferences and seminars, as well as special events in Israel's Parliament (Knesset), to raise consciousness about the importance of running for office. We also held numerous seminars for women election candidates in regional councils, as the goal of the day was to provide them with the opportunity to network, exchange know-how about the election process in regional councils and learn from the experience of others. In addition, our flagship "Women for Future Leadership" program was held in a north location (Haifa), a central location (Modiin) and a southern Israel location (Ramat Negev), to ensure that all women aspiring for leadership, including in the upcoming elections in Israel, have access to attend. We also held follow-up programs for several groups of WePower graduates from previous years.

In preparation for the municipal elections, WePower also continued the "College for Politics" program, targeted specifically at women who are interested in running for the elections, by providing them with the know-how and tools to conduct a political campaign. Moreover, this past May WePower opened additional sessions of this program, which were also provided to participants online via WebInR. A total of 80 women participated in the College for Politics program. Most importantly, a majority of the program's participants announced that they will consider running in the upcoming elections for positions such as Mayor, Head of a Candidate Party List, Council Member or representative of regional councils in plenaries.

– The results are speaking for themselves — 40 per cent of this year's graduates and 12 per cent of the last 5 years' graduates of WePower's programs are in fact running for office in the upcoming October elections.

Women must be reached, encouraged, trained and supported (even in isolated regions) to seek decision-making positions, which in turn will empower them to help others, and thus bridge the gender gap. Access to the services which help empower women to be able to run for office on an equal footing with men is therefore crucial, if we realistically strive to narrow the gap. Only such an empowered woman can come to elections from a position of knowledge, experience, support and belief in public service. She will also know, once elected, how to make women's needs a priority and a part of relevant government and public sustainable development agendas.